

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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NO, NO, NO: DHS SECRETARY REFUSES TO COMMIT TO MEANINGFUL HOMELAND SECURITY REFORMS

Washington, D.C. – One week after a terrorist attack on the transit system in London killed or injured hundreds of riders during morning rush hour, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Michael Chertoff presented Members of the House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee with his ‘second stage review,’ plan for the DHS, but offered few details and no commitment to substantive policy changes to plug existing loopholes that remain in air cargo security, chemical security, public transit security, hazmat shipments, liquefied natural gas (LNG) security, and bioterrorism. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA) has authored legislation to close many of these loopholes and sought DHS commitment for meaningful security reform.

“The Bush Administration has chosen time and time again to allow the corporate interests to trump the safety concerns of millions of people. We are reminded by the London bombings of how vulnerable we remain to a domestic terrorist attack. While the millionaires who have benefited from the Bush tax cuts might not ride the bus or subway or live next door to chemical facilities, millions of ordinary Americans do – when will the Department of Homeland Security and Congressional Republicans do something to protect THEM?”

Rep. Markey asked Chertoff to respond to questions addressing remaining homeland security concerns in six critical areas: air cargo security, chemical security, public transit security, hazmat shipments, liquefied natural gas security, and bioterrorism threats.

Vulnerability #1 – Air Cargo Security

Representative Markey: Approximately 22 percent of all cargo transported by air in the United States is carried on passenger planes. Almost none of this cargo is inspected for bombs. In the past, this cargo loophole has been exploited with deadly results, such as when Pam Am Flight 103 was blown up over Lockerbie, Scotland by a bomb hidden in unscreened baggage. Yes or no – would you support a requirement that 100 percent of the cargo carried on passenger planes be inspected, just as all checked bags, carry-on bags and passengers are currently inspected before boarding?

Secretary Chertoff: No.

Vulnerability #2 – Chemical Plants

Representative Markey: Mr. Secretary, last week I released a report that indicated there are more than 100 facilities in 23 States that could threaten 1 million or more people. Yes or no – would you support a requirement that chemical companies switch to safer technologies in order to reduce the consequences of a successful attack?

Secretary Chertoff: Refused to commit.

Vulnerability #3 – Public Transit

Representative Markey: The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has identified specific security recommendations in order to prevent what happened in London from occurring here. Would you commit to following the recommendations presented by the APTA? [APTA recommended \$6 billion in transit security needs for U.S. public transportation systems, approximately the same amount of money we’re spending each month in Iraq.]

Secretary Chertoff: Refused to commit.

Vulnerability #4 – HAZMAT Shipments

Representative Markey: As you know, shipments of extremely hazardous materials such as chlorine routinely travel through densely populated areas. These shipments are basically mobile chemical weapons that often share the same track as urban passenger rail systems and could kill or injure 100,000 people within half an hour. Yes or no – would you support requiring that these shipments to be re-routed around sensitive areas when a safer route exists?

Secretary Chertoff: Refused to commit.

Vulnerability #5 – Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)

Representative Markey: Terrorists may be interested in targeting LNG tankers and terminals, which could result in catastrophic consequences for communities surrounding these facilities. Yes or no – do you think that LNG facilities should only be sited offshore or in remote areas away from population centers?

Secretary Chertoff: No.

Vulnerability #6 – Bioterrorism Threats

Representative Markey: DHS has only completed material threat assessments on FOUR of the 60 biological, chemical and radiological agents that it is required to assess under Project Bioshield. Yes or no – will you commit to completing the rest of these threat assessments within 60 days?

Secretary Chertoff: No.

More information on Representative Markey's work close existing loopholes in aviation, chemical, transport, nuclear and hazmat security can be found at <http://www.house.gov/markey/>